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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Wednesday,

November 4, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CARING FOR FURS." Information from the Bureau of Biological Survey and the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, United States Department of Agriculture.

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My subject today reminds me of a line I heard not long ago. The speaker, describing a foot-ball game, said, "The Yale side rose and cheered as one raccoon!" No elaboration is needed. The 'coon coat has become almost a symbol of collegiate life, at least in New England, and particularly at foot-ball games. Perhaps the reason for its popularity is that it can take such a lot of hard knocks, so much careless handling, and still look well and keep the wearer warm. I knew a girl who got a raccoon coat when she went to college in 1925. She wore it all four years, in class and out-of-doors, had it relined once, and the front and pocket edges renewed twice. The other day I saw her, still wearing the eleven-year-old coat on her way to a foot-ball game!

We can't all have raccoon coats, and some of us are beyond the age when they are suitable. But whatever kind of a fur coat we invest in, we can and should get the best possible wear from it. Several weeks ago, when we discussed buying fur coats and fur-trimmed garments, I promised to tell you what Frank G. Ashbrook, of the Bureau of Biological Survey, U. S. Department of Agriculture, recommended in regard to their proper care. Mr. Ashbrook, you remember, is in charge of the Section of Fur Resources of the Bureau.

"The wear and continued good appearance of fur on a coat, or of a fur coat, will depend on the care that it gets," says Mr. Ashbrook. "If abused, even a good fur may not last so long as an inferior one given good care. The dealer will often tell you how to care for the particular fur you choose. But in general, it might be said that the greatest detriment to fur comes from friction, moths, heat and light. A woman should remember, to begin with, that after fur peltries are processed, they are not elastic. If you sit down in a fur coat without unbuttoning it, the buttons may tear out, or the back seams may split, or baggy places may develop. Get the habit of shrugging the shoulders slightly after unfastening a fur coat and before sitting down. This will lift it a little.

"Have you ever seen a fur coat worn bare on one side where the wearer always carried a purse? Or on the lower left sleeve, where she rested her arm on the door of the automobile as she drove? Or on the cuffs, where they rubbed against the steering wheel? Even a hat brim cut too long in back will wear off the fur of a beautiful collar.

"Fur coats, scarfs and trimming may be combed very gently with the flow of the fur every few weeks to prevent the hair from matting. 'Flow' is the furrier's word for 'in the direction the hairs point'. After combing, shake the garment vigorously to keep the fur fluffy and get rid of some of the dust that is bound to settle on the fur while it is worn.

"The danger of moth attack is lessened when the same coat is worn constantly, but in our heated houses moths fly the year around. They are particularly fond of fur, it seems, and may deposit their eggs on a fur coat or in the fur trimming of a cloth coat if it is laid away for even two or three weeks. The street coat, therefore, is less likely to suffer than the dressy coat, worn semi-occasionally. A cedar chest or a tight garment bag is the best place to store such coats between wearings. So-called moth-proof bags are not protective unless they will absolutely shut out parent moths seeking a good feeding place for their young. Be sure no moths are in the coat when it is put in the bag. The hole where the hanger comes through is one of the places moths get in. Crevices along the edges will also admit them. When the bag is tight enough to confine the fumes, additional protection is obtained by putting in some crystals of naphthalene or paradichlorobenzene (para-di-chloro-ben-zene). Never allow chemical moth preventives to touch the fur itself. These chemicals may react on some fur dyes so as to cause spots.

"Occasionally, take the garment out of the bag and after brushing it well, air it. While cold storage is not practicable during the winter, for these coats worn at intervals, in summer it is about the best possible protection. It keeps the garment safe from moths and at the same time, because of the humidity maintained in cold storage vaults, prevents the leather from drying out and losing its natural oils.

"If a fur coat or the fur on a coat gets wet, there's a right way and a wrong way to dry it. First wipe the fur gently with a Turkish towel along the flow of the fur. Then hold it by the hem and shake it well. If the fur piece is a scarf, hold it by the head. Hang on a padded hanger where there is a circulation of cool air. A doorway is a good place. Whatever you do, never hang it near a radiator or other heat, or in a very hot room. Don't put it into a crowded closet, or into any kind of a closet until it is thoroughly dry. If it can hang free from other clothing, its fur will stay more fluffy.

"There used to be an old idea that furs should be sunned. This is quite wrong, the fur specialists think. Any heat, including sunshine, draws the oils out of the leather, makes it hard and dry, and shortens its life. Here's a funny thing: Light actually fades dark furs, makes white ones yellowish. Even the continuous light and heat from an electric bulb will injure furs. For this reason, you will not find furriers exposing beautiful fur garments in their show windows for long at a time.

"A fur garment is one piece of clothing that should be cleaned by an expert. The furrier or dry cleaner has facilities for tumbling the garment in a drum with specially treated sawdust until it is clean. If the lining is very soiled, he takes it out and dry-cleans it separately."

Some of the more fragile furs, Mr. Ashbrook said, are reinforced when made into coats and wraps. Thin cloth is tacked or cemented on the back to prevent seams from ripping and relieve strain on the leather. This is always done with the more expensive furs like mole, broadtail, or Hudson seal (dyed muskrat), but when a fur coat is made up as cheaply as possible and often from inferior grades of fur, this precaution is not included in the construction. So we should give extra care to a low-priced coat that is made of any of the less durable furs.

